



Your Pinion on Secession

Split will guarantee us quality education

There has been no more volatile, controversial issue in the history of Staten Island than the one on which we'll be voting in November — secession. And no aspect of that issue hits closer to home for the average Island family than education.

Proponents of secession may bicker endlessly about tax rates and abatements, bond revenues, commercial development and residency criteria, often to yawns in the audience. But when the subject of what will happen to our kids and their schools if secession occurs is raised, one is guaranteed of an impassioned response. And lately the direction those educational considerations have been pushing the people of our community has become crystal clear.

I can think of no better argument for the secession of Staten Island from the other four boroughs than what we've seen happen to public education in New York City over the past year.

In one debacle after another, from the "Children of the Rain-bow" curriculum to condom distribution to the disgraceful asbestos disaster, we've seen an astonishing display of arrogance, ignorance and incompetence by City Hall and by the educational establishment of our city, paralleled by their disregard for the wishes of parents or the standards of the community.

The people who run the school bureaucracy in New York just

don't get it! They don't seem to understand that the system exists not for them to build personal empires upon, to use as their private soapbox, [nor to] further someone's political agenda. Our educational system exists solely for the children of our city and for the parents of those children on whose shoulders the ultimate responsibility for their upbringing rests; the same parents who pay the taxes that pay the salaries of the people who try to exclude them from the educational process.

When I heard the outrage in the voices of the parents who testified against the "Children of the Rainbow" curriculum, I knew that a raw nerve had been touched in the people of Staten Island. They were not about to be dictated to by ideologues from other boroughs, as well as an entrenched array of educational bureaucrats with an agenda of social subversion, who were telling them, in essence, they know more about what is appropriate and good for the school children than parents do. That's when I began to realize that secession would provide the only answer for the families of Staten Island concerned about their kids' education.

Since then, that fact has become more and more obvious as we've watched the city's educational structure deteriorate alarmingly, culminating in the asbestos debacle which threw the

entire school system into chaos at the commencement of school this year. Could any event have spoken more eloquently or better exemplified our borough's need for self-determination? Does anyone believe it would have been possible for matters to get so out of hand if it had all taken place under the watchful eyes of the local community?

Here we had the spectacle of an arrogant city administration, which feels it has no obligation to answer to anyone, joining forces with an incompetent educational hierarchy to produce total paralysis in the nation's largest school system, hurting the youngsters, the parents, the teachers, the city as a whole, and not seeming to give a damn about it until relentless pressure by the media, parents and officials finally forced them to take action.

We all sat and watched in horror as our school system collapsed before our very eyes with highly paid administrators admitting they have completely fouled up the kind of asbestos inspection program that's been carried out successfully in thousands of other locations, both locally and across the country. They compounded that insult by issuing confusing, contradictory, arrogant and incorrect statements, excluding parents from the decision-making process, usurping the legal powers of others and causing the maximum apprehension and inconvenience to the children and parents of the city they're supposed to serve. When that behavior is combined with the "Children of the Rainbow" grotesquerie, the internal squabbling that accompanies all educational decisions in our city, the lack of appropriation of a fair quota of educational funds to Staten Island, the continually declining citywide test scores and the low esteem in which New York's school system is held by the rest of the nation, something must be done!

It's obvious that the educational bureaucracy has sensed for some time that the level of outrage in the community at the failings of their bloated, unresponsive dinosaur of a system has grown so great that there would have to be changes made.

That is why proposals suddenly started cropping up in Manhattan and Albany over the past few months to decentralize the system and give the people of the boroughs more of a voice in the education of their kids. And may I add, thank heavens for those appointed members to the central Board of Education we fondly refer to as "the gang of four." They have given parents and children the greatest hope ever to revitalize a meaningful decentralized school system.

But, while such a measure of true decentralization, however, with a functional bond to a central structure, might have worked a



While voters put secession under a microscope, organisms collected on a field trip are scrutinized by these students from PS 52, Dongan Hills.

few years ago — again, a significant step in the right direction — I must admit it's simply too late for it now. The whole educational system must be torn apart and revamped. Some of its failures are so deeply ingrained citywide that only a totally fresh start would have a chance of working, and the way Staten Islanders can achieve that fresh start, not only for our miserably failed imposing central educational structure but for the whole business of how we govern ourselves in general, is through secession.

In court, when a prosecutor seeks to achieve a conviction, he presents clear and compelling evidence to a jury concerning the guilt of the party he's prosecuting.

JERRY CAMMARATA
Rosebank

(The writer is a member of the Staten Island Community School Board.)